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ABSTRACT

Planning, a key management responsibility, is the process of determining the thrust of an organization's activities. The basic concepts of planning are objectives and policies. Objectives are the ends by organizational effort. Policies limit the means by which ends are sought. Strategic planning concentrates on determining the ends to be sought, while operations planning concentrates in determining the means of obtaining objectives. Problem solving is the basic process used in planning. Who participates in planning is critical, as those who participate will support the plan while those who do not participate will likely fear and resent it. Planning is a line management responsibility. (Author)

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A Framework for Planning

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Abstract

This paper defines key planning concepts and presents an orderly progression of planning processes. Planning, a key management responsibility, is the process of determining the thrust of an organization's activities. The basic concepts of planning are objectives and policies. Objectives are the ends sought by organizational effort. Policies limit the means by which ends are sought. Strategic planning concentrates on determining the ends to be sought, while operations planning concentrates on determining the means of obtaining objectives. Problem solving is the basic process used in planning. Who participates in planning is critical, as those who participate will support the plan while those who do not participate will likely fear and resent it. Planning is a line management responsibility.

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A Framework for Planning

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Planning, a key management responsibility in any organization, is the process of determining the direction and thrust of the organization's activities. As a result of investing time and effort in planning, a manager obtains tools for controlling and focusing the organization's efforts. If a manager does not invest time and energy in planning, the organization is shaped by circumstances and crises. It drifts purposelessly, and deteriorates. The result of a plan-less existance has been put this way: "Where we are going is determined in large part by goals and objectives established (our plans). If there are none, the answer is obvious (Lahti, 1973, p.13)." The purposes of this paper are to define planning concepts and present an orderly progression of planning processes.

Definitions

The two basic concepts of planning are objectives and policies. Objectives are the ends sought by organizational effort. Objectives (goals) specify the intended state of some attribute of the product or impact of organizational effort and are answers to questions like: "How are the people we work with to be different as a result of organizational effort?" and "What are the critical aspects of the outcomes of organizational effort?" Objectives can be vague or specific, long or short term, achievable only once or achievable over and over. Short term measurable objectives narrowly direct behavior and can provide persons with a sense of accomplishment and progress. Long term vague objectives can provide motivation and a sense of mission but allow individual interpretations of the meaning of the objectives, and hence generate diffusion of efforts.

Policies limit the means by which ends are sought. While objectives show what is to be achieved, policies narrow the choice of how an objective is to be achieved. Hungate (1964) has described policies in education as philosophies of how learning is best achieved. A policy defines a range of acceptable actions and/or unacceptable actions. A rule specifies one way of operating. A procedure is a set of rules while a program is a grouping of procedures.

A plan is a statement of objectives and a pattern of policies and programs for achieving objectives. A plan often includes estimates of resources needed to carry out the programs and statements of assumptions upon which the objectives are based (Hungate, 1964, p.158).

Planning efforts fall on a continuum in terms of their relative emphasis on ends (objectives) or means (policies and programs). Planning which concentrates on determining the ends to be sought by an organization can be termed strategic planning. Planning concerned with the means of obtaining objectives can be termed operations planning. The distinction between strategic and operations planning is one of degree, and many planning efforts fall between the two. Strategic planning usually (but not necessarily) is concerned with the long term where many assumptions must be made. Planning naturally proceeds from strategy to operations. Strategic planning gives futurity to operations planning. Long and short term planning differ from each other in the time dimension but are not necessarily equivalent to strategic and operations planning. Both strategic and operations planning can be long or short term.

A plan which encompasses broad objectives and policies is a mission statement for an organization. Mission statements, buttressed with assumptions about the future, more specific objectives and policies, outlines of programs and estimates of resource requirements, are strategic plans. Detailed descriptions of programs including personnel and the resource requirements which are intended to accomplish specific objectives are operations plans.

The basic process used in planning is problem solving which is a systematic effort to (1) identify the problem, (2) detail the problem, (3) generate alternative solutions to the problem, (4) evaluate alternative solutions, and (5) select the best solution. A manager uses the problem solving process to generate objectives, policies, programs, and resource estimates.

A final key concept in planning is participation. Half of the benefits of planning are the skills people develop in the process. As the only persons developing planning skills and attitudes are those taking part in the planning, who participates is important. A second consideration is the problem of implementing a plan. Persons who participate in producing a plan are more likely to implement the plan. Those who do not participate are less likely to endorse the implications of the plan and are more likely to resent and fear its implications. Those charged with carrying out the implications of a plan should be involved in developing the plan. Planning which occurs in an isolated staff group will not likely be implemented and thus will not provide focus and motivation to the organization. Worse

yet, only the planners will increase their skills at planning. Planning must be a line responsibility. Staff can serve as catalysts in planning, generating information needed in the process, but must not do the planning to the exclusion of line officers. In addition to the line officers directly affected, others should be involved in planning either to enhance their skills or because their approval is critical to acceptance of the product of planning. Planning should be an ongoing process evolving as circumstances change and should occur at all levels in an organization.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is the process of determining the direction of an organization. A strategic plan specifies a pattern of objectives and major policies and programs (Christensen, Andrews, & Bower, 1973). The most difficult part of strategic planning is determining objectives for the organization. The manager generates objectives using the following sequence:

1. The problem is "What are our objectives?"
2. What is our area of concern? Who are we to affect? How are they to be different after contact with us? What is the current state of our area of concern and what is our position in it (i.e., the market and our market position)? What are the projected states in our area of concern in (for example) 1, 2, 5 and 10 years? What are our strengths and weaknesses?
3. What are possible objectives in the projected states?
4. Which objectives are feasible for us and what are the implications of the objectives?
5. Select objectives.

When the manager has selected objectives, he defines major policies to guide and limit actions using the following sequence:

1. The problem is "What restrictions, reservations or limitations should we place on our efforts to attain our objectives?"
2. What preferences do we have for governing our actions? What larger social interests are we in danger of violating? What other agencies or groups do we compete against (affect), and what is the impact of our objectives and actions on them?
3. What policies might be possible?
4. What are the implications of the various policies?
5. Select policies.

The manager develops programs in the same way beginning with the question: "Given our policies, what programs would achieve the objectives?" The programs should be detailed only enough to allow estimates of resources needed. The final strategic plan should include (1) area of concern, (2) current circumstances (strengths and weaknesses), (3) assumptions about the area's future, (4) objectives, (5) policies, (6) programs, (7) resource needs, and (8) urgent items for action.

Operations Planning

Operations planning is the process of creating concrete plans for actions which will implement the objectives, policies, programs and resources outlined in strategic plans (Mize, White, & Brooks, 1971). Operations planning usually address the short run, although nothing precludes operations planning for projects anticipated far into the future. Using the problem solving process, a manager plans operations by determining the following: (1) concrete, achievable objectives,

(2) methods, (3) resources, (4) standards of performance and results, (5) measures of performance and results, (6) methods of comparing standards and measures and tolerance limits for any observed differences, (7) corrective actions to be taken when tolerance limits are exceeded, and (8) schedule for operations.

In planning for operations, a manager begins by deriving concrete, achievable objectives from objectives stated in strategic plans and from the circumstances facing the organization at the time of implementing the objectives. The objectives are the manager's interpretations of what longer term objectives entail for the short term given the current circumstances. Using problem solving, the manager defines programs, procedures, and methods to achieve concrete objectives. He identifies needed resources and decides on how to overcome deficiencies in available people, skills and materials. A very important part of the manager's planning is to clearly define what is to be considered adequate performance and results. He must determine ways of measuring the standards, for a standard without a measure is not effective. Fortunately, a measure can be a subjective judgment of a qualified person. The manager will need to decide how much results can deviate from standards before he initiates corrective actions and what the corrective actions should be. Finally he schedules the operations, and plans are ready to become actions.

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